

At the first meeting of the A. O. U. Committee on the Classification and Nomenclature of North American Birds I was honored by having the request made of me by the Committee to make a report upon the entire structure of *Chamæa fasciata* with the view of throwing, if possible, some light on its position in the system, and although that is several years ago, all my continued efforts failed in securing the necessary material to the carrying out of such a task. Recently, however, through the great generosity of Mr. G. Freaux Morcom, of Chicago, and the timely assistance of Mr. F. Stephens, of San Bernardino, Cal., thanks to both, I can now report that I have in my possession for the aforesaid piece of work, an exceptionally fine series of alcoholic specimens of the *Chamæa fasciata*. During the years of waiting I have not been idle myself, and I have alcoholics of many desirable forms to compare with our subject, but still many are among my desiderata and will be acknowledged with gratitude, as well as duly so in the Memoir, if sent to me. Such a bird as *Accentor modularis*\* would come into play, perhaps, or some of the Old World forms of the Timeliidæ; any species of the genus *Lophophanes* will be acceptable, and Wrens and Tits generally. Just as soon as other unfinished work will permit me, I will now put forth my best endeavor to render a full account of the structure of this interesting species, and that will fall within the year, — the powers permitting.

Very respectfully and faithfully yours,

R. W. SHUFELDT.

Fort Wingate, N. Mexico. May 21, 1887.

#### 'Scarcity of Adult Birds in Autumn.'

TO THE EDITORS OF THE AUK:—

*Sirs:* In a late (January) number of 'The Auk' Mr. Beckham asks for an explanation of the fact that out of three hundred and sixty-seven birds collected by him in Colorado and Kentucky between Sept. 1 and Nov. 22, 1886, three hundred and forty-eight were birds of the year, leaving only nineteen adults, of which eleven "were species resident where collected." The question thus raised was anticipated and answered in my recent paper on Bird Migration † by the following:

"IV. That with most North American birds the majority of adults either precede or accompany the first flights of young in the autumnal migration I am convinced by a long field experience, during which, moreover, I have failed to find any proof that the young of a single species precede the old. My evidence in support of this statement is of two kinds: (1) Observations made on the departure of birds from their breeding stations. (2) Observations on flights arriving from localities north of the stations of observations. The first class of evidence, in my opin-

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\* Professor Alfred Newton, F. R. S., writes me from Cambridge University that he has had collected for me a full series of this bird, for which my most sincere thanks are gratefully tendered.

† Mem. Nutt. Orn. Club, No. I, March, 1886, pp. 15-16.

ion, is much the more reliable, for reasons which will be given presently. It includes a long array of notes, from which I select and condense the following:—

“At all points where I have collected regularly and systematically through July, August and September I have found that the adults of most of the smaller land birds which migrate before October, and especially of those which migrate by night, begin to disappear as soon as the young become able to shift for themselves. Their departure is usually gradual, and often scarcely perceptible from day to day; but before there is any appreciable diminution in the number of young the adults have become so scarce that they commonly represent less than five, and often not more than one per cent. of the total number of individuals of their respective species present. As a rule they disappear as soon as, and often before, they have completed their summer moult, whereas the young usually linger for some time after their autumnal plumage is perfected. Every New England collector who has paid especial attention to obtaining adult birds in full autumnal dress will testify to the truth of this statement. With the Warblers there is often the greatest difficulty in securing such representatives of even the commonest species.

“My experience with species which come from further north is that the first flights are composed largely, and often entirely, of old birds. The reason why this fact has been overlooked, or even positively denied by so many observers, becomes apparent when we consider the dates at which even the earlier autumnal migrants are said to reach Massachusetts from the north.

“Almost without exception the time is fixed somewhere in September, and I venture to say that the majority of the New England collectors still believe that September 1 marks about the beginning of the autumnal migrations. This impression has resulted from the fact that our collectors are usually absent at the mountains or seashore during August. Even if obliged to pass the dog-days nearer home, they rarely think of taking the field at a time when it is supposed that there is nothing of value to be had there. The weather is hot and enervating, the foliage is at its densest, birds are silent and hard to find, and most of them in such ragged plumage that they are worthless as specimens.”

“Now the simple truth is that the migrations of the most of our small birds begin early in August. During the last two weeks of that month there are usually several real ‘rushes,’ when the woods throughout Eastern Massachusetts are filled with such northern species as *Turdus swainsoni*, *Sitta canadensis*, *Dendroica coronata*, *D. maculosa*, *D. blackburniae*, *D. castanea*, *Sylvania pusilla*, *S. canadensis*, *Seiurus noveboracensis*, *Empidonax flaviventris*, etc.”

It is gratifying to have so much of the above corroborated by Mr. Beckham’s experience. Perhaps other contributors to ‘The Auk’ may be able to add something on this interesting and important subject.

WILLIAM BREWSTER.

Cambridge, Mass.